

Untitled document

National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," November 4, 2011

ROBERT SIEGEL, host: From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. I'm Robert Siegel.

GUY RAZ: And I'm Guy Raz.

Nineteen days, that's how long the congressional supercommittee has to make a deal to reduce the nation's deficit by at least \$1.2 trillion. So far, taxes have been the sticking point. Or, as they seem to be known here in Washington these days, revenues. Republicans have resisted but Democrats insist that new taxes must be part of any deal. Well, there are signs now of a possible breakthrough.

Speaker of the House John Boehner suggested yesterday that there is room for revenue, as long as any increases are paired with cuts to entitlement programs. And 40 Republican House members signed a letter addressed to the supercommittee Wednesday, saying that all options for spending and revenues must be on the table.

Among those Republicans was Charles Bass, of New Hampshire. He joins us now from his office. Welcome.

REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES BASS: Good to be with you.

RAZ: And talk to me about what kind of taxes or revenue increase you would be willing to support as part of a deficit reduction deal.

BASS: Well, I and I think the other signers of this letter are trying to avoid making specific recommendations to the committee. But what we really want them to do is to feel that they can address the issue of revenues, be it through closing loopholes, making the tax code simpler, working, you know, with the Democrats to come up with a proposal.

And what we're trying to say, on the one hand, is don't be restricted by the dogma of either party. While on the other hand, understand that you have to come up with a plan that is big and not little. We believe that one and a half trillion dollars worth of reductions in the growth of government does not satisfy the mandate of our group because we believe that the American people expect more from Congress.

RAZ: So Congressman Bass, in simple language, what you're saying is Democrats have to be willing to make painful cuts and Republicans have to be willing to consider the possibility of an increase in taxes.

BASS: Exactly right.

RAZ: You have signed Grover Norquist's pledge not to raise taxes, as have most of your

colleagues. Is that a problem? Are you - I mean, for you and for your other colleagues?

BASS: I'm prepared to make big decisions that may be politically difficult. The Grover Norquist tax pledge, which I signed, I believe in. I don't believe we should be raising taxes. But I also don't believe that deficits and the debt can continue on its current course.

So I have to make a choice if the committee comes up with a big deal, if you will, that includes revenue increases that may be in conflict with the Grover Norquist tax pledge. I would only point out that at the beginning of this year, I took a pledge to uphold the Constitution of the United States and defend America against enemies, both domestic and foreign. And I consider the debt crisis in this country to be a real threat to the future of America.

RAZ: Do you believe many of your fellow Republicans would say the same thing?

BASS: Yes, I do. I think, in the end, especially if the American people say, please, save this country for future generations. I said to my colleagues in some - in jest, how can you not be for a big plan when the American people hold us in such disrespect now? I mean, how can it be any worse?

RAZ: If it fails, as you know there are automatic triggers that would require drastic cuts; at least a third of the Pentagon's budget, for example. If it doesn't succeed are we talking about some very, very big problems ahead?

BASS: Well I think that the specter of across the border sequestration, which is what you just described, is very ugly. And that is one of the persuaders, if you will, that members need to be willing to work together and compromise. I, for one, will not vote to wave the sequestration process because I really think that we need to apply maximum pressure on all lawmakers to take difficult positions that require courage to resolve this nation's crisis - just as is going on in other countries around the world.

RAZ: Even if it means you will lose your seat for voting for it?

BASS: I got elected to Congress last year, from my perspective, to solve this nation's problems. I'm not here to win elections.

RAZ: Congressman Bass, thank you so much.

BASS: You're welcome.

RAZ: Charlie Bass is a Republican congressman from New Hampshire.